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ABSTRACT

Teaching at Essex Community College in Maryland has offered several English instructors endless possibilities for program development. Two such public programs developed by one instructor are "The Why of Sports" and the Creative Writing Forum. The former involved six programs and an art exhibit showing the connections between sports and the humanities and arts, and the latter is an annual 2-day event including a public reading by a nationally known writer and a series of workshops by local creative writers for selected high school and community college students and teachers. The former program was funded by the college. The latter project was rotated between Essex and 2 other schools, with a steering committee chosen from the 3 community colleges and representatives from Baltimore County (Maryland) schools. Each year each of the 23 county high schools chooses 3 student representatives to participate. Over the 10 years the Forum has existed, the featured writers have done a wonderful job working with the students. (CR)

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Al Starr

Teaching in a Two-Year College: Endless Possibilities

ED 400 542

I remember walking by the English department bulletin board and stopping to read one of the notices. My stopping to read anything on this particular bulletin board is unusual, for I generally ignore its announcements of meetings and unobtainable jobs. But for some reason, a "Call for Papers" caught my eye. As I started to read it, I realized that what was being described was something that I wanted to know more about. So I asked our department secretary to photocopy the document, and I took the copy back to my office so that I could read it more closely.

The "Call for Papers" came from Mark Reynolds, who had been selected to edit *Two-Year College English: Essays for a New Century*, an anthology to be published by the NCTE. These essays were to provide a picture of what teaching English in a community college would be like at the beginning of the next century.

Among the topics that were suggested in this call were many that caught my attention. These included teaching in a correctional facility (I had taught college courses at Jessup Prison for nine years); teaching special populations (I had offered various courses to the Friendly Seniors, a group of students who are between sixty and eighty years old); teaching in unusual places (I had taught in Blue Cross/Blue Shield Headquarters and in a hangar at Martin Marrietta, the aerospace manufacturer); and teaching unique courses (I had created Introduction to Minority Literature and a travel study course on Robert Frost, for example).

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When I wrote to Mark Reynolds to express my interest in being part of this collection, I described each of these possibilities as the source for an essay. I wanted Mark to make my job easier by selecting one or two topics for me to pursue. Instead of allowing me to take the easy way out, he suggested that I write a teaching autobiography that described the endless possibilities that teaching English at Essex Community College had provided for me.

What resulted was an essay that had the same title as this session. In this essay, I discussed the opportunities that community college teaching had afforded me. What I did not get a chance to do was to describe the contributions of various other members of my department. Today, I am joined by two of my colleagues, Florence Hessler and Ralph Stephens, who will help me to explore the endless possibilities that teaching at Essex Community College has offered us and the other members of our department.

At the end of our presentations we will be pleased to answer questions, but more importantly, we would like you to share some of the opportunities that are available for English teachers at your colleges. In this way, we can all come away with new ideas about what we can do to keep our professional lives as vital as possible.

. . . . . .

When I became a community college teacher in 1974, my teaching responsibilities were clear-cut: I was to teach three to four sections of developmental English and one or two composition classes. This teaching load outlined my job, but it definitely did not indicate its possibilities.

Today, I am going to describe two public programs which I developed, "The Why of Sports" and the Creative Writing Forum. The former involved six programs and an art exhibit that showed the connections between sports and the humanities and arts , and the latter is an annual two-day event that includes a public reading by a nationally known writer and a series of workshops by local creative writers for selected high school and community college students and teachers. In both cases, I am going to show how these projects resulted from my work, the work of others, and the support of my college.

In 1981, I developed a new course, Sports in Literature and Film, through which I hoped to study sports critically. While I was working on the course proposal, I began thinking that it might be worthwhile to broaden my approach and to attempt to reach other individuals who would not be affected by my new course. I then remembered how Peter Adams, one of my colleagues, had developed a series public programs on the literary works associated with the Chesapeake. Recalling Peter's very successful programs led me to the idea of having Essex Community College sponsor a full semester of activities that would show the relationship between athletics and various other disciplines at the college. After I discussed my general plan with several of my colleagues, I revised my origin concept and started to work on "The Why of Sports" -- a series of activities that would look at sports from a humanities and arts perspective.

As a first step, I contacted several individuals who helped me to plan the actual program. Of the ten members of the planning committee, only three were English teachers. A fourth member of the

committee was the head of the drama department at an area college. Thus, of the ten members, only four were associated with the humanities and the arts. An additional three members came from athletic departments of area colleges, and two more served in public relations positions with local professional sports teams. Finally, the tenth member was a sports editor for the *Baltimore Sun*.

After some months of planning by the committee, I sought funding for "The Why of Sports" from Maryland Humanities Council. Despite various assurances that the proposal would be received favorably, it was turned down. At this point, I considered giving up on the project. Instead, I reconsidered and approached the administration at Essex with a proposal that the college fund "The Why of Sports," and to my surprise, the college agreed to provide support for the entire project.

During the fall of 1983, "The Why of Sports" took place. It included a film series, several individual presentations, and several panel discussions.

The first session looked at the myth and reality of the sports hero. It included a film historian, who discussed the image of the boxing hero in film; a presentation of *Rocky I*; and a local sportcaster, who talked about the "real" boxers that he knew.

The second event, "Why Sports Mean So Much," involved a lecture followed by a panel discussion. The lecturer, a sports historian, spoke about the importance of sports during various historical periods. His presentation was responded to by a panel made up of a college lacrosse coach, two professional athletes, a sportcaster, and two sports fans.

The third program, "Sports and Racial Attitudes." examined how professional baseball first mirrored racial attitudes and then became a testing ground where inroads were made in changing those attitudes. On this evening, a historian described the period just before the integration of professional baseball. This presentation was followed by a film about the Negro Leagues. Then a panel made up of former players from the Negro Leagues, of two former professional baseball players who knew Jackie Robinson and Satchell Paige, and of a scholar responded to the lecture and film.

The topic for the fourth program was "The Image of Women Athletes in the Media." On this evening a sports historian discussed the problems most women athletes have in getting media coverage of their efforts. After this talk, the film *Pat and Mike* was shown, and a panel, including an athlete, a newspaper reporter, and a sports photagrapher, elaborated on the evening's topic from three different perspectives.

The highlight of the series was the fifth evening; the theme that night was "The Modern Organization of Sports: Gains and Losses." After the main speaker described the effect of free agency on sports, a panel made up of a sports agent, a professional athlete, a reporter, a sportscaster, and the general managers of two professional teams, addressed this issue and also wide range of subjects, including unions, strikes, and drug use by athletes.

The final evening of the series was devoted to "The Olympic Spirit-- Myth or Reality." The program began with a member of the International Olympic Committee's presentation on the meaning of the Olympics. Following this presentation, *Chariots of Fire* was shown,

and two former Olympic athletes and one of the coaches of the 1984 Olympic track team responded to the film and the talk.

While these programs were being presented, Essex Community College also sponsored an exhibit of the photographs by a local sports photagrapher. This exhibit was well attended and was a tremendous success.

As I reflect on this project years after its completion, I am still glad that my department and my college allowed me to complete it. Over the last ten years, I have received similar support for the Creative Writing Forum.

Several months after "The Why of Sports" concluded, my department head asked me to attend a lecture by Sally Fitzgerald on Flannery O'Connor. During the introductory part of the program, I found out that her lecture was part of a series of events and that each of the individuals who received an invitation on this particular evening was either a high school or a college English teacher. Although I was fascinated by the Fitzgerald's talk, what amazed me even more was the way I felt during the question and answer period that followed it. During the question and answer period, the audience was transformed for me from a group of high school English teachers and a group of college English teachers to a group of <u>teachers</u> who had a common interest in Flannery O"Connor.

After the talk, I spent some time with Charles Allen, who was then supervisor of English for Baltimore City schools and who had hired me eleven years before to teach high school English. During our conversation, he told about another series of events that included high schools and colleges working together. Johns Hopkins University

had sponsored a series of readings by well known creative writers to get Baltimore City high school students interested in creative writing. He added that although the series was successful, it was not repeated because of budgetary constraints.

In the weeks that followed that evening, I often thought about what I wanted to borrow from it for a project of my own. I wanted to come up with an idea that would remind high school and college English teachers that they were doing different parts of the same job and one that would excite students about writing creatively.

A year later, I presented a general plan for the Creative Writing Forum to my division chairman and an English supervisor from Baltimore County. Both were impressed with my ideas and urged me to pursue ways to turn my concept into a reality.

The first direction I considered was grant funding. When I spoke to the grant writer in the development office at Essex, she suggested that I file grant applications with several agencies and then wait. Listening to her brought back memories of my failed attempt to get funding for "The Why of Sports," so I decided to try to find an alternative source of funding. I knew that if I asked my college to pay for the event alone, that it would most likely occur only once because of limited funds. Then I came up with a way to fund the Forum that would be easier to sustain. There are three community colleges in Baltimore County. Although these college are now part of a system, at the time they merely shared a common board. I decided to approach the other two colleges with my proposal and the suggestion that we rotate the Forum from one college to the next. To my surprise, the other two schools were very enthusiastic

about the idea. But there was one missing piece, so I asked the English Office of the Baltimore County Public Schools to co-sponsor the Creative Writing Forum. I received this office's full support.

We set up a steering committee that included English department members from the three community colleges and representatives from the county schools. This committee revised my original plan before the first Forum took place in 1987. During the past ten years, the Creative Writng Forum has evolved to its present arrangement which I will now describe.

Each spring, this Friday evening, Saturday morning event takes place at one of the three community colleges in the county. Approximately one month before the Forum, each of the twenty-three high schools in Baltimore County selects three student representatives. At the same time, each of the three community colleges in the county chooses three student representatives. Then each of the selected students is given a booklet containing selected works by the featured author for that year. The featured writer knows that all of the students who attend the Forum have read these particular works; thus, he or she can make reference to them.

On a selected Friday evening, a nationally known author gives a reading to which the public is invited and for which no admission is charged. This presentation is preceded by individual readings by four high school students and one community college student and is followed by a reception for the author and the audience.

Saturday morning is reserved for special activities for selected Baltimore County high school and community college students and teachers. These activities include writing workshops conducted by

local creative writers and creative writing teachers; an open reading by the students; and a luncheon attended by the featured writer, the students, and their teachers. The luncheon is followed by a short talk by the guest writer and the presentation of signed copies of one of his or her books to every student and teacher in attendance.

Over the ten years the Forum has existed, each of the featured writers has done a wonderful job not only during the public reading, but also in working with the students. The featured writers have been William Stafford, Linda Pastan, Josephine Jacobsen, Henry Taylor, Nikki Giovanni, Sharon Olds, Mary Oliver, Stephen Dunn, Nancy Willard, and, this year, Joy Harjo.

The "Why of Sports" and the Creative Writing Forum are two of the many possibilities that teaching English at Essex Community College has offered me. Now you will hear from Ralph Stephens about some of the directions he has pursued.